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LOGISTICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PANHANDLES OF  
NORTH VIETNAM AND LAOS

JUNE 1969

Project No. 54.5285

30 July 1969

DIA review(s) completed.

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Logistical Developments in the Panhandles of  
North Vietnam and Laos  
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Introduction

This is one in a series of monthly reports that assesses the level of Communist logistical activity in the southern part of North Vietnam and in the Panhandle of Laos.

North Vietnam

The increase in logistical activity that was noted in the Panhandle of North Vietnam during the month of May continued into early June; however, during the latter part of the month there were signs of a definite slackening in activity. By late June, truck activity on the main access routes into Laos (Routes 15 and 137) had declined to a relatively low level and traffic on Route 137 was predominantly northbound. The northbound traffic probably reflected the movement of portions of the enemy's logistical apparatus out of southern Laos (because of the wet season) back into North Vietnam. Traffic on Route 1036, which leads to the western DMZ area, was highest in mid-June when 104 trucks were photographed\* during a seven day period. Much of this traffic was associated with road construction on the route. Little traffic was noted in the areas immediately north of the DMZ.

\* The weather in the North Vietnamese Panhandle was generally poor during June with some improved weather in the latter part of the month. A total of 210 tactical air reconnaissance flights were flown, compared with 271 in May and 316 in April.

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Shipping off the coast of North Vietnam was at about the same level as May (28 vessels per day compared with 29 per day in May) and was still well below the level established immediately after the November 1968 bombing halt [REDACTED] Coastal traffic also was heavier in early June with 34 vessels per day tracked during the first 10 days of the month declining to 19 per day during the last 10 days of the month. Sea shipments into the Vinh area were the heaviest since January as three foreign flag vessels were offloaded by lighters at the Hon Ngu anchorage. The ships involved were the Hon Chi 149 and Hon Chi 150 both from Communist China, and Singaporean registered Lucky Dragon. The Chinese ships carried 12,000 tons of maize and rice while the Lucky Dragon carried 5,000 tons, most of which was fertilizer.

Rail activity continued at a high level at Vinh. Overall the logistical activity at the Vinh rail transshipment area was the heaviest observed since immediately after the bombing halt in November 1968. Photography in late June revealed 70 pieces of rolling stock at the Vinh rail yard along with large quantities of open storage and numerous trucks which were transshipping material from the rail storage area. An expansion of the rail storage and transshipment area was noted underway in late June photography. We do not know the reason for the present activity at Vinh but it may be a normal replenishment of stocks in the area which may have been drawn down during the past dry season as a consequence of the relatively large shipments to southern Laos and the development of forward supply areas in Quang Binh Province.

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Laos

During June, the flow of traffic into and transiting the Laotian Panhandle and the visual (air and ground) detection of it was affected by the Southwest Monsoon. Despite the worsened weather, however, the estimated tonnage of supplies moved into southern Laos was only about 15 percent less than the monthly average for the 1968-69 dry season (October through May) and was well above that brought in during June 1968\* (see Appendix A, Table 2).

a. Access Routes

The combined effects of bad weather and air interdiction during June probably influenced the enemy to reduce truck traffic on the roads south of both Mu Gia and Ban Karai Passes, the two main entry points into Laos. Pilot sightings of trucks on both Passes fell sharply (by 60 percent) compared with May. Roadwatch reporting also indicated

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traffic was down. Southbound traffic through Mu Gia, for example, amounted to 21 trucks a day, compared to 33 in May, but was still slightly above that of a year ago (see Appendix A, Table 3). On the northernmost access route through Nape Pass a roadwatch team near the border reported very light traffic (1 truck a day southbound) during the month. Our information on the new southernmost access routes near the DMZ continues to be sketchy, [REDACTED] available. However, pilot sightings averaged 1 truck a day on Route 1039 during the first 10 days in June. Sections of the petroleum pipeline in Laos were successfully attacked during June, causing several sustained fires. No new extensions to the pipeline were noted in Laos or North Vietnam during the month.

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b. Within the Panhandle

Enemy truck movements in the Laotian Panhandle as noted by all sources declined during June. Roadwatch teams scattered throughout the Panhandle continued to report small convoys occasionally moving past them, particularly early in the month. Pilot reports showed a sharp drop in truck sightings in the Panhandle during the month. Sightings also were down from that of a year ago despite a much larger number of attack sorties flown this year. Pilot sightings indicated that traffic continued to follow the main north/south routes in the northern part of the Panhandle and light traffic was observed on the principal exit routes into South Vietnam, including Route 922 into the A Shau Valley, and Route 165/966 east of Chavane. Pilots reported negligible traffic on Route 110. In this connection, however, only about 12 percent of

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all attack sorties are flown in the lower Panhandle and of those only about one-fourth are at night when most truck traffic is known to move. [REDACTED] truck traffic in the Panhandle declined for the third consecutive month. The low point was reached during the third week in June, when only 125 trucks were detected in the entire Panhandle.

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Summary

During June, the full impact of the heavy rains associated with the arrival of the Southwest Monsoon was felt on the logistic system in southern Laos. Nevertheless, the Communists continued to move a substantial quantity of supplies into the Laotian Panhandle. The estimated tonnage moved in during the month was only about 15 percent below the monthly average for the 1968-69 dry season and was well above that for the same month a year ago.

Despite a continued high rate of allied air attack against supply routes in southern Laos and the adverse effects of wet weather, traffic continued to move most of the time. During the month, the Communists withdrew portions of their logistical support apparatus -- probably as a reaction to the seasonally heavy rains and a cutback in personnel infiltration activity noted since late March. Evidence available to us, however, indicates that enough of the enemy's logistical structure is staying in the Panhandle to maintain a moderate level of logistical



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activity throughout the rainy season, as occurred last year.

In the North Vietnamese Panhandle, the overall level of logistical activity was relatively high during the first part of June but (except for the Vinh area) declined during the latter part of the month, presumably reflecting the lower level of activity in Laos. Traffic on the two main roads leading toward southern Laos had declined to a relatively low level by the end of the month.

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APPENDIX A

Table 2

Estimated Average Monthly Tonnage of Supplies Moved from  
North Vietnam into the Laotian Panhandle Over Roads and Trails, October  
1967 - June 1969 a/ b/

	<u>1967-1968</u>	<u>1968-1969 c/ d/ e/</u>
Dry Season, October through May (Daily Average)	5,490 (180)	6,630 (220)
May	3,720	9,080
	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>
Wet Season, June through September (Daily Average)	3,080 (100)	<div data-bbox="1084 1318 1170 1388"></div>
June	3,990	5,700
July	3,290	-
August	2,260	-
September	2,790	-

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APPENDIX A

Table 3

Truck Statistics - Laotian Panhandle  
Daily Averages

	<u>Jun 69</u>	<u>Jun 68</u>	<u>1968-69</u> <u>Dry Season a/</u>
Sighted	59	81	230
Destroyed	9	10	23
Damaged	5	Negl.	9
Attack Sorties Laotian Panhandle b/	332	62	374
<u>Roadwatch Team Reports</u>			
Number of Trucks Sighted in the Panhandle	92	107	110
Trucks Southbound through Mu Gia Pass	21	19	27

a/ 1 October 1968 through May 1969.

b/ Sorties by US aircraft, including B-52s, against all types of targets.

c/ Data are for the period 30 October 1968 through 31 May 1969.

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APPENDIX B

Results of Air Attacks  
on Fixed Targets in the Laotian Panhandle

Extremely poor weather during June continued to hamper air operations over the Laotian Panhandle. Reports of damage to fixed targets declined for the second consecutive month and amounted to about 75 percent of the monthly average noted since last November (see Table below). The continued decline in reported damage resulted both from a fall-off in bomb damage assessment (BDA) information caused by poor visibility in the area and a decrease in the level of armed reconnaissance sorties flown.

Targets reported damaged and destroyed during June continued to be primarily road segments, truck parks, storage areas, and structures/bunkers. However, the number of antiaircraft weapon sites reported damaged dropped sharply below previous month totals, probably as a result of an annual retrenchment on the enemy's part during the June-September rainy season.

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APPENDIX B

Fixed Targets Destroyed and Damaged by Armed Reconnaissance Attacks  
in the Steel Tiger Area of the Laotian Panhandle \*

<u>Target</u>	<u>June</u>	<u>May</u>	<u>Monthly Average</u> <u>Since 1 Nov '68</u>
Road Segments	366	463	637
Truck Parks	104	125	220
Watercrossing Facilities	89	72	81
AAA/Auto. Weapon Sites	71	448	323
Storage Facilities/ Military Complexes	360	385	350
Bunkers/Structures	334	244	212
TOTAL	1347	1737	1823
Armed Reconnaissance Sorties	9690	9840	11,500
B-52 Sorties **	270	260	570

\* Data compiled from the NMCC Daily Operational Summary.

\*\* Results of B-52 attacks are not reflected in the above table. BDA data for B-52 strikes in Laos is limited only to reports of resulting secondary explosions and occasional post-strike photography. B-52 raids have been mostly concentrated against enemy storage areas, truck parks, and troop and bivouac positions.

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